



Beware of Door-to-Door Contractors During Flood Cleanup

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MADISON – Recent heavy rains have led to flooding throughout Wisconsin, and many homeowners will use a possible break in the weather this weekend to clean up any damage to their homes. In the hardest hit areas, homeowners may find their progress disrupted by door-to-door contractors promising to provide quick help at a great price. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is urging Wisconsin residents to be leery of promises made by these fly-by-night contractors (also known as “storm chasers”) as these operations have a history of doing subpar work for high prices or simply running off with a victim’s money.

“Storm chasers travel to hard-hit communities and offer seemingly irresistible deals for construction or repair help,” said Sandy Chalmers, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection. “They pressure homeowners for upfront payments or increase their prices arbitrarily as they work. These teams come and go from an area without a trace, leaving consumers empty-handed and with no recourse for any work they have not completed or any damage they’ve done to a homeowner’s property.”

Consumer Protection offers these tips for homeowners with storm damage:

- Be wary of any contractor who knocks at your door. Call the police or sheriff’s department to check them out.
- Hire a contractor based on referrals. Ask friends and neighbors for recommendations and ask contractors for references. Before you sign a contract, contact Wisconsin’s Bureau of Consumer Protection to see if we have received complaints about the business.
- Try to get a local contractor. Ask contractors if they are subcontracting your job. Be careful if local contractors are using outside subcontractors.
- Get lien waivers from anyone you pay for home repairs. It is necessary to do this because if the person collecting the money does not pay the supplier or worker, a lien could be put on your property.
- Get a written contract with a start and completion date and warranty information. Also, make certain that the contract states exactly what work is to be done and what materials are to be used. Never rely on verbal commitment.
- Contractors that register with the state are issued a card. Make sure that any contractor you are considering hiring shows you their state registration card.
- Have someone watch the work being done. Check with your local building inspector to see if the work requires a permit and make sure an inspector visits the job site before you provide final payment.
- Request a copy of the contractor’s certificate of liability insurance.

“These traveling scammers are banking on you jumping at the first offer of help that you receive,” added Chalmers. “Turn them away and do your research to find a reliable contractor.”

Contact DATCP if you have questions about a contractor: find us on the web at datcp.wisconsin.gov, contact us via e-mail at DATCPHotline@wi.gov or call our toll-free hotline at 1-800-422-7128.

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